

Update: Rwandan-Supported M23 Rebels Have not Withdrawn from the DRC; The U.S. Department of State signed MOU on Electric Vehicle Battery Value Chains.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi said Tuesday the M23 rebel group had not fully withdrawn from areas it seized in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), accusing the militia of faking an agreed pullback of its forces. Regional leaders brokered an agreement in November under which the Rwandan-sponsored group was meant to withdraw from recently seized positions by January 15 as part of efforts to end a conflict that has displaced at least 450,000 people and sparked a diplomatic crisis between DRC and neighboring Rwanda. Tshisekedi again accused Rwanda of fueling the conflict by supporting the rebels (an accusation also leveled by Western powers and U.N. experts).

Back in December 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called on Rwanda to pull back its troops from the eastern DRC and encourage M23 rebels to do the same. “We are looking to Rwanda to use its influence with M23 to encourage” them to withdraw their troops, Blinken said at the end of the three-day US-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC, on Dec. 15. “Rwandan forces need to pull back” as well, he added. M23 rebels are responsible for the deaths of thousands of DRC civilians and the looting of strategic and critical minerals from the Congo that are being exported to China.

On January 18th, 2023, the Department of State released the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on electric vehicle battery value chains signed by the United States on December 13, 2022, during the Africa Leaders Summit. Through this MOU, the United States will support the commitment between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zambia to develop jointly a supply chain for electric vehicle batteries. The MOU supports the DRC and Zambia’s goal of building a productive supply chain, from the mine to the assembly line, while also committing to respect international standards to prevent, detect, and take legal action to fight corruption throughout this process. The DRC produces more than 70 percent of the world’s cobalt.

Congolese President Says M23 Rebels Have Not Withdrawn as Agreed

<https://www.voanews.com/a/congolese-president-says-m23-rebels-have-not-withdrawn-as-agreed-/6922452.html>

US Asks Rwanda to Make Troops, Rebel Forces Withdraw From Eastern Congo

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The United States Releases Signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to Strengthen Electric Vehicle Battery Value Chain
<https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-releases-signed-memorandum-of-understanding-with-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-and-zambia-to-strengthen-electric-vehicle-battery-value-chain/>

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US Asks Rwanda to Make Troops, Rebel Forces Withdraw From Eastern Congo

- **Congo strengthens US ties as dispute with Rwanda intensifies**
- **Eastern Congo has been wracked by conflict since the 1990s**

By Michael J Kavanagh December 17, 2022 at 3:28 AM EST

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Rwanda to pull back its troops from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and encourage M23 rebels to do the same.

Blinken's remarks underscored America's acceptance of Congolese allegations that Rwanda backs the M23 rebellion, which the United Nations says has displaced almost 400,000 people since March. Rwanda denies the accusations.

"We are looking to Rwanda to use its influence with M23 to encourage" them to withdraw their troops, Blinken said at the end of the three-day US-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC, on Dec. 15. "Rwandan forces need to pull back" as well, he added.

Eastern Congo has been wracked by conflict since the 1990s, when violence from the aftermath of Rwanda's civil war and genocide spread across the border. More than 100 armed groups remain active in the region. Some, like the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR, have links to the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide, which left at least 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead.

The M23 is mainly made up of Congolese of Rwandan ethnicity who say they're fighting against groups like the FDLR.

UN experts say Rwandan forces have also been in Congo fighting these groups, which Rwanda says are allied with Congo's army. Blinken called on the FDLR and similar militias to "stand down."

"When they say the FDLR are a problem, we have to recognize the FDLR are Rwandan and kill many more Congolese than they cause casualties in Rwanda," Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya in an interview Thursday on the sidelines of the summit.

US Support

British High Commissioner to Rwanda Omar Daair earlier this week urged the Congolese government to take more action to tackle any collaboration between its armed forces and armed groups such as the FDLR.

Congo is participating in a number of ongoing peace talks with African leaders in part to find a way for the FDLR to go back to Rwanda, Muyaya said.

During the summit, the US strengthened ties with Congo, Muyaya said. The two countries made progress on a working group on sustainable development and environmental issues and signed an agreement to support a plan to an electric-car-battery manufacturing initiative with Zambia, Muyaya said.

Congo produces about 70% of the world's cobalt, a key battery element. It's also home to the second-largest tropical forest and biggest tropical peatland. Both act as carbon sinks that serve as a bulwark against climate change